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SUBJECT: TADIC AND KOSTUNICA

Classified By: Amb. Michael C. Polt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary and Introduction

¶1. (U) As Tadic heads to Washington, we would like to share some additional observations about him, about how his views on key issues compare with Kostunica's, and why his visit represents an opportunity different from Kostunica's July visit.

¶2. (S) Tadic tends to take a more realist, pro-Western tack than the prime minister on major issues. In contrast with Kostunica, Tadic attaches more importance to U.S.-Serbian relations; he privately accepts the reality of Kosovo's independence and is focused on "the day after;" he openly calls for Mladic's arrest; and he publicly supports Serbia's membership in NATO.

¶3. (S) As leader of Serbia's largest democratic party, Tadic faces a daunting task of balancing his electoral ambition (and bringing his DS into a leading position in government) and the need for good relations with Kostunica. His desire to avoid conflict with Kostunica and to maintain his party's poll numbers makes him less bold than he should be on some key issues.

¶4. (S) Tadic is perhaps the best interlocutor we have to manage the Kosovo endgame and other key issues, and he is likely the democrats' best shot to lead Serbia toward a stable, democratic and prosperous future (although any future democratic government would almost certainly be centered around a Tadic-Kostunica coalition). We therefore have a clear interest in supporting him and urging him to be bolder. His visit to the U.S. gives us a good opportunity to do this - by reinforcing his pro-Western vision for Serbia, by demonstrating to the Serbian people the benefits of a strong relationship with the U.S., and by strengthening the President's role in the defense and security area (particularly important as we approach the Kosovo denouement).

Some examples of where Tadic's approach differs from that of Kostunica:

Kosovo

¶5. (S) While the PM refuses, publicly or privately, to acknowledge the likelihood of Kosovo independence, Tadic privately recognizes the importance of preparing for independence and securing what is possible for Serbia and Kosovo's Serbs. He has appealed directly to us on two occasions to "give him a good deal on decentralization and churches" to help him through elections. You might recall that it was Tadic who, at great political risk, called on

K-Serbs to participate in the October 2004 elections in Kosovo. Kostunica refused to do so, and Tadic's numbers dropped (a fact that has made him more gun shy about sticking his neck out on Kosovo in future). As DefMin in March 2004, Tadic played a crucial role in ensuring a calm and responsible reaction to violence in Kosovo.

¶16. (S) Tadic has recently begun focusing on "the day after" Kosovo's status is decided. In private meetings with Ambassadors Polt and Wisner, he has emphasized that he will begin the day after Kosovo's settlement to strengthen relations with the three axes of Serbian foreign relations - the U.S., Europe and, inescapably, Russia. Although he might publicly toe the government line and stand behind Kostunica, his head is in the right place to accept the inevitability of Kosovo's independence and help his country move forward toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

War Crimes

¶17. (S) Tadic will be more receptive to messages on ICTY cooperation than Kostunica. Tadic openly calls for Mladic's arrest and appears committed to real action in bringing him and the other fugitives to justice. From the beginning of his term in office, Tadic recognized the importance of ICTY cooperation, whereas Kostunica has only reluctantly been cornered into taking on the ICTY issue (when he became PM in 2004, he stated that ICTY cooperation was not a priority). Last year, Tadic visited Srebrenica on the 10th anniversary of the massacre, gave an emotional address to the nation after viewing the gruesome Skorpions video, and delivered an apology in BiH for Serb war crimes. (He did later visit the site of Serb victims in eastern Bosnia, but refused a demand

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from Bosnian Serbs to visit that site during his Srebrenica trip.) By contrast, Kostunica met with several PIFWCs on their way to surrender to ICTY, has never pronounced the word "arrest" in relation to Mladic, and called Srebrenica a necessary counteroffensive on the part of Bosnian Serbs.

Montenegro

¶18. (S) Tadic's approach to the Montenegro referendum also gives us some insight into how he might be more amenable in the Kosovo endgame. Although Tadic, like Kostunica, publicly advocated the preservation of the State Union, he also supported the EU/Lajcak process (Kostunica tried to work directly with Solana, without consulting Montenegro leaders, e.g. trying to get the 260,000 Montenegrins in Serbia on the voters list). Tadic immediately recognized the results of the referendum and visited Podgorica three times in the following weeks, all while Kostunica continued to grumble about the process and initially made an effort to bring into question the outcome.

Relations with the U.S. and NATO

¶19. (S) Unlike Kostunica, Tadic is committed to building U.S.-Serbian military cooperation. Also, unlike Kostunica, Tadic openly supports Serbia's membership in NATO and has actively pushed key security agreements with NATO and the U.S. (GLOC, SOFA). Kostunica publicly criticized the GLOC initially and hesitated in his support for the SOFA. He has been overly timid on some counts - delaying the naming of a new reform-minded chief of defense or retiring old-school generals from the military, for example. Tadic's visit offers a good opportunity to bring home deliverables (with SOFA, discussions with Ohio) to improve U.S.-Serbian military cooperation.

¶10. (S) While Tadic differs from Kostunica on these key

issues, he is caught in a balancing act as the country nears elections. Tadic is assuming he will have to work with Kostunica after elections, and is therefore careful not to alienate him. Under any scenario in which democratic forces beat the Radicals, Tadic and Kostunica will need to work together to some extent. However, if Tadic heads into elections with strong support (including from the U.S.), he feels he can afford to take bolder action to lead the democratic forces to an electoral victory.

¶11. (S) In sum, despite his shortcomings as a leader, Tadic will be a much more receptive interlocutor during his visit than the Prime Minister, especially on the major questions of Kosovo, ICTY and mil-mil cooperation. This visit offers the opportunity to secure at least private assurances from Tadic of even more decisive cooperation on these issues, and to help shape his leadership plan as elections near.
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